

Vexillum utravis (MELVILL, 1925) Trawled in Philippine Waters

by

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(Plate 18 and One Textfigure)

During the summer of 1960 several specimens of an unknown *Mitra* species were sent to me by Fernando Dayrit of Manila. Although superficially similar to *Vexillum caffrum* (Linnaeus, 1758), *Vexillum melongena* Lamarck, 1811, and others, and incorrectly identified under these names in several collections I have examined, it differs from these species in several respects and it was impossible to feel satisfied with such an identification. Recently I came across the original description and figures of a species which I believe pertain to this shell; namely, *Mitra (Vexillum) utravis* (Melvill, 1925). I repeat the original description here, and offer the accompanying plate and discussion in the hope that it may help other collectors who have been puzzled by this species. To the best of my knowledge, nothing has been published on *V. utravis* subsequent to the original description which appeared in the Proceedings of the Malacological Society of London in 1925; those who do not have access to this publication may find the following discussion useful.

The specimens sent me by Mr. Dayrit were brought up in otter trawls from a mud bottom, in from 20 to 40 fathoms in Carigara and Maqueda Bays, Philippine Islands (see map). The fishing trawlers from Manila work this area frequently because it is particularly rich in shrimp and bottom-feeding fishes which they obtain for the market. Other gastropod species brought up in the same area by the trawl nets include: *Tibia fusus* (Linnaeus, 1758); *T. powisi* (Petit, 1842); *Cypraea pulchella* Swainson, 1823; *Turris speciosa* (Reeve, 1843); *Epitonium scalare* (Linnaeus, 1758); *Volva volva* (Linnaeus, 1758); *Conus alabaster* Reeve, 1849; *C. sulcatus* Bruguière, 1792; *C. radiatus* Gmelin, 1791; *C. sowerbyi* Reeve, 1849; *C. insculptus* Kiener, 1850; and others.

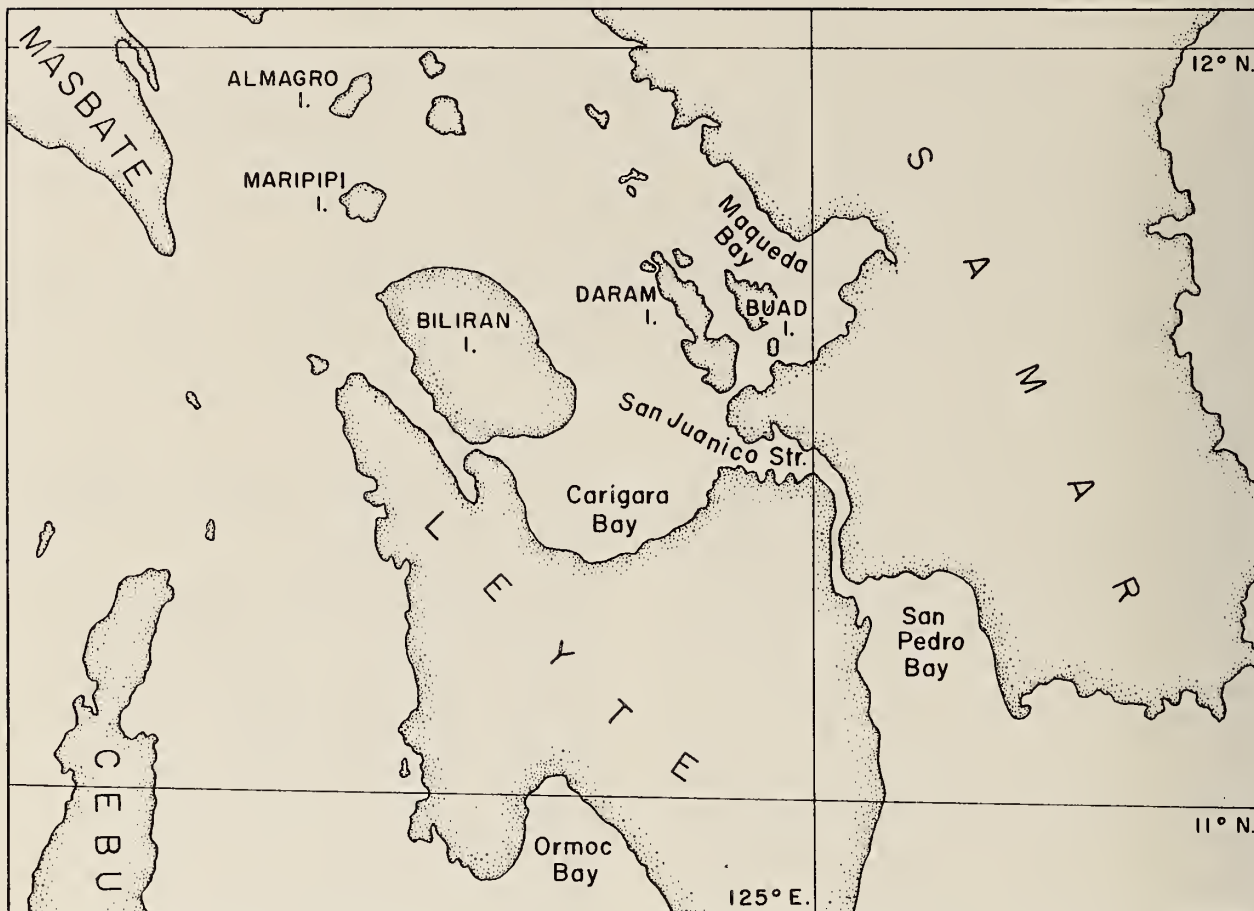
Melvill's original description of *Vexillum utravis* is as follows:

"*Mitra (Vulpecula) utravis*, n. sp.

Shell biconical-fusiform, somewhat shining, dark chestnut brown, whorls eight, all, excepting the nuclear, very closely longitudinally ribbed, but these are evanescent on the dorsal surface of the body-whorl, which is therefore quite plain and smooth. The upper-whorls are spirally once white banded just above the sutures, the body-whorl possesses two such bands, one at the periphery, the other half-way between it and the base, this being narrower, and not so distinct. The ribs are sharp, and clearly defined, slightly flexuous, suturally impressed, interstices closely sulcate, aperture pale grey, outer lip only slightly thickened, columellar margin four-plicate canal recurved basally. Long. 30. Lat. 10 mm. Hab. ---?

This is a puzzling species, and may be a hybrid between *M. caffra*, L., and *M. melongena*, Lam. There are likewise some points of resemblance with *M. formosensis* Sowb., but that much larger species (Long. 50, Diam. 16 mm.) is noted for its deep sutural impressions, and very rounded whorls, while the longitudinal ribs are, as in the case with our new species, obsolete on the dorsal surface of the body-whorl."

It will be noted that Melvill placed his species in the subgenus *Vulpecula* Blainville, 1824; this subgenus is presently regarded as a synonym of *Vexillum* Röding, 1798. I do not recognize this specific name (*utravis*) as an adjective and I therefore do not change its form when combining it with the currently accepted generic name of neuter gender.



Textfigure 1: Type Locality of *Vexillum utravis* (MELVILL, 1925) - Carigara Bay, Samar Sea, Philippine Islands

Melvill apparently formulated the name *utra-vis* (meaning "either one or the other") with a tongue-in-cheek attitude; as seen in his quoted discussion of the species he also recognized its affinity for *Vexillum caffrum* and *V. melongena*. It is also possible the name stemmed from the fact that the species is either ribbed or smooth, depending on the aspect in view.

One important character was omitted in the otherwise adequate description of *Vexillum utravis*: that is the presence of several fairly prominent lirations inside the lip. A second photograph of the same specimen is shown here (Plate 18, fig. 3) in which these lirations may be clearly seen.

The specimens sent to me by Mr. Dayrit agree favorably in size with Melvill's measurements of the holotype; in a series of seven specimens, the smallest measures 28.6 mm., the largest 39.0 mm. A small degree of variation in relative width can be seen in the series, one

or two individuals being slightly more ventricose than the average; however, this is still well within the normal limits of variation among the Mitridae. The measurements of the present series are as follows:

Length	Width
(in Millimeters)	
28.6	9.3
30.5	10.7
32.6	10.2
34.1	10.6
36.7	10.8
36.9	10.5
39.0	10.9

Vexillum utravis differs from *V. caffrum* (Linnaeus, 1758) chiefly in that the ventral surface of the body whorl is ribbed, the dorsal surface smooth; in *V. caffrum* the entire body whorl is smooth, sometimes the penultimate



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

Dorsal and Ventral Aspects of *Vexillum utravis* (MELVILL, 1925)

Figures 1 and 2: Normal View of Shells
Figure 3: View Showing Lirations Within Lip